The Influence of Learning Environment on Learners' Attitude in a Foreign Language Setting

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate whether there was relationship of classroom learning environment with attitude of secondary school students, gender differences and location-wise differences in Pakistani context in which English is taught as a foreign language. Data were collected from 720 secondary school students in 06 districts of the Punjab Province. Two questionnaires were used, one for learning environment and second for measuring students attitude towards English language.

After the instruments were found to be reliable and valid, Data were analyzed statistically. Mean score of each item of the two questionnaires was calculated to find central tendency of responses. Gender differences were analyzed by using t-test and Pearson Correlation was calculated to find out relationship between learning environment and attitude towards English.

Analysis showed that significant differences were found between male and female students on classroom learning environment and attitude towards English. It is further concluded that female students were more favorable on classroom learning environment and had more positive attitude towards the learning of English.

Significant positive correlation was found between classroom learning environment and attitude towards the learning of English. Results showed that learning environment may be made

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favorable by fostering better pupil-teacher relationship in order to develop positive attitude to learn a foreign language.

Keywords: Learning Environment; Attitude; Foreign Language Learning; Classroom Settings.

Introduction

The task and challenge of foreign language teaching and learning is often associated with Classroom dynamics which involves various dimensions of classroom learning environment. The field of learning environment has become an area of interest for language teachers because what happens in the classroom affects the learner's attitude in one or the other way.

Coleman (1990) states participation in classroom activities are related with feelings of personal worth and related to greater peer approval and satisfaction with one' role. Traditional classroom requires pupils to work in the class on the same subject at the same time as instructed by the teacher and interaction between the teacher and the students usually occur in groups and in a very structured manner. On the contrary the open classroom environment is more flexible where students feel more freedom and can move around the building. This environment is individualized in which students work on their own speed. Classroom learning environment plays a vital role in determining the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of teaching and learning in English in Pakistan. English, being a foreign language is considered to be a cause of anxiety due to classroom psychosocial environmental factors among the students.

School and Classroom Environment

School environment is of a paramount importance to promote learning process. This type of atmosphere prevailing in the school is a perpetual inspiration for the children to learn more and more. The reason is that the children receive an intellectual type of frame of mind from the academic atmosphere and that type can be created by providing a separate room for the study, by providing books and journals and discussion.

Classroom environment is the total of all social, emotional, mental and physical factors that makes overall contribution to the total teaching learning process within the classroom. A **democratic** classroom might be one that is gives more sense of freedom and large degree of permissiveness to foster healthy teacher-pupil relationship and where students are allowed to work independently.

On the other hand, an **autocratic** environment may be described as controlled by the teacher in which teacher decides the goals and the learning activities to be taught. The students do not participate in the selection of learning activities. Yarrow et al (1997) conducted a study by administering College and University Classroom Environment Inventory (CUCEI) to improve the classroom learning climate of pre-service secondary teachers and ultimately of

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the students. In another study, students viewed their actual environment less favorable that the preferred environment.

Attitudes of the Learners

International discussions have concluded that language learning is closely related to the attitudes of the learners towards the language (Starks & Paltridge, 1996). Four aspects of attitude has been identified which all refer to the term attitude. They include emotions aroused in a situation, emotions associated with a stimulus, expected consequences and relationship of a situation to personal values (Hanula, 2002).

Attitude is a learned pre-disposition or tendency on the part of individual to respond positively or negatively to some objects, situations, concepts, or another person (Aiken, 1996). It is a learned pre disposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to a given object. Students' attitude to specific subject depends on the surrounding environment given to them. Classroom environment determines the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and feelings of joy and fear towards a particular subject.

Learning a foreign language involves many psycho-social and cultural factors which also affect the attitude of the learners in one or the other way. The learners might relate their beliefs, experiences and emotions to language learning which are directly or indirectly influenced upon by the environment of the classroom. Classroom learning activities, student-teacher relationship, support from the teacher and cooperation in the class constitute the learning dimensions of the classroom.

The other dimensions might include learners' involvement, nature of investigation and peer relationship, some other have also been discussed in various studies. The present study focused to explore some dimension of learning environment in Pakistani context and how they are correlated with the attitude of the learners.

Review of the Related Literature

Environment in an education setting refers to the atmosphere, tone, ambience or climate that prevails that particular setting. Consequently, studies in the field of classroom learning environment focused on psychosocial aspects of human behavior (Dorman, 2008).

Successful teachers monitor student behavior in the classroom. They make each student responsible for some work during the learning activity and then monitor to see that it was actually accomplished. These teachers are strong student motivation (Wood, 2001). The inside classroom environment is concerned with the feelings, experiences and perception of the students (Dunn & Harris, 1998).

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Students' achievement is interdependent on psycho-social interactions that happen in the classroom. These interactions sometime make a difference with reference to students' achievement and their academic goals (McRobbie et al., 1997).

With the growing trend and focus on the field of classroom learning environment, it became a rich area of interest for the researchers. The availability of many instruments made in easier and possible to investigate into learning environments in specific context. The student-teacher interaction and relationship were investigated, assessed and perceived in different contexts indicating interesting results (Fraser, 1998).

Lim (1993) conducted a study in secondary school environments which attempted to compare different types of learning environments and educational streams. Khoo and Fraser (1997) explored the learning environments in adult education computer education in secondary and primary classes. The whole process of teaching and learning contributed towards the psycho-social dimensions of the classroom environment.

Student-teacher relationship, classroom management, individual differences, instructional techniques have become a compulsory part of learning environment. Teacher plays a key role in the making of classroom climate. He is the agent who imparts instruction, monitors the performance and modifies the behavior. The teacher makes decisions and adjustments to enhance motivation, pupil-teacher relationship, engagement and productive work.

Participation in classroom activities is linked with the satisfaction and feelings of personal growth. Nijhuis (2005) reported that there exists a relationship between teacher's strategies and learning environment. In some of the studies, findings revealed that with positive classroom learning environment, teacher can teach better and students are able to learn better (Hansen and Childs, 1998). Favorable learning environment also improves academic and professional standard of the school and leads to higher achievements (Goddard, 2000; Heck, 2000).

Due to fast growing trend to investigate classroom environment and its effects, many related instruments were validated particularly with reference to ten dimensions i.e. relationship between classroom environment and behavioral outcomes, evaluation of educational innovations, differences between students' and teachers' perceptions about classroom, comparison of girls and boys perceptions about learning environment and influence of learning environment on attitudes of the learners in a particular subject.

Fraser et al (1996) worked on WIHI instrument to assess classroom learning environment. This added some new dimension along with some dimension from the past questionnaires on learning environment. The WIHIC included dimensions that contain recent trends and concerns in classroom learning like equity and cooperation, and promotion of comprehending rather than rote-learning.

Research Questions

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The purpose of the study was to find out the relationship of classroom learning environment with the attitude of the students towards the learning of English as a foreign language. Following research questions were designed to address the problem:

1. What are students' perceptions about their learning environment?
2. How do they feel about their foreign language class?
3. To what extent there are gender differences regarding learning environment and attitude?
4. How does classroom learning environment correlate with attitude of the students?

Methodology

It was a survey study that aimed at exploring possible relationship between classroom learning environment and students' attitude towards English as a foreign language. The context of the study was classroom environment of secondary school students in Pakistan, in English language class.

English is taught as foreign language in Pakistan and is a compulsory subject up to graduate level.

Secondary school students face highest failure ratio in English that is usually linked with subject-matter, appropriate methodology, teacher training, classroom situation, pupil-teacher relationship and psycho-social learning dimensions of the classroom. Classroom environment affects students' attitude to learn a language positively and negatively.

In order to investigate into and determine the degree of relationship between learning environment and attitude of the students, quantitative method was adopted. The sample of the study was 720 students of 10th grade from six districts of the Punjab province of Punjab. Sample was drawn by using stratified sampling technique through which male, female students were selected. Thus from 48 secondary schools, which were further divided into 12 male and 12 female schools. From each selected school, 15 students were selected randomly and thus the researcher had (180 male, 180 female) and (180 male, 180 female) and the total sample was 720 students.

The researcher used two questionnaires to collect data. The questionnaire on students' attitude was developed by the researcher and the questionnaire on classroom learning environment was adopted that was named as 'WIHIC' and developed by B. Fraser (1996). The attitude scale had two subscales and the learning environment scale had seven subscales.

Reliability of the two scales was determined through Cronbach alpha coefficient. The Cronbach alpha reliability ranged from .71 to .85 for the subscales of learning environment scale and .95 for the whole scale that indicated that the instrument is strongly reliable. For Attitude scale, it ranged from .83 to .88 for subscales and for overall scale it was .92 that showed that the instrument was reliable.

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The validity of the instruments was established in two steps. For face and content validity, subject specialists were consulted and pilot testing was conducted. For construct validity, item total correlation was calculated. Item total correlation showed that both instruments were valid and suitable for the study. The correlation coefficients range from .216 to .870 (item no. 3) with total score of the Learning environment scale as whole which indicated that each and every item had high positive correlation at .001 that established high construct validity of the scale.

For attitude scale, the analysis of item total correlation revealed that there was no item with poor item total correlation when every item of Attitude scale was correlated with the total items of the scale.

The correlation coefficients range from .341 to .817 significant at .001 level with total score of the Attitude scale as whole that established high construct validity of the Attitude Scale.

After the instruments were found to be valid and reliable, date were collected and analyzed by using SPSS. The analysis and interpretation is given below:

Analysis and Findings

Analysis was made using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Gender differences were determined on each subscales of learning environment scale and then on each subscale of Attitude scale. Then relationship was found between these two instruments using Pearson Product moment correlation technique. Tables given below would illustrate the data.

Analysis of Learning Environment Scale gender-wise

Table-1   Difference between males and females on subscale Student
               Cohesiveness through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	29.91	6.141	
				3.036
Female	360	31.23	5.449	

df = 718; p <.01

Table-1 shows that there is significant difference between males and females about student cohesiveness. The significant difference was observed through the calculation of t-test which

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indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.036 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had different level of student cohesiveness in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no significant difference about student cohesiveness of males and females" is not supported. It is further concluded by this analysis that the mean scores show that the female students have higher cohesiveness, that is, they are closer to one another in their English classroom than the male students.

Table-2   Difference between males and females on subscale Teacher Support through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	29.57	7.097	
				3.594
Female	360	31.35	6.184	

df = 718; p < .001

Table-2 illustrates that there is statistically significant difference between males and females about Teacher Support. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.594 at .001 level is greater than the tabulated value= 3.291 at .001 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had different level of Teacher Support in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference about Teacher support of males and females" is not supported. It is further concluded by this analysis that the mean scores show that the female students receive more teacher support than the male students. The Mean = 31.35 and SD = 6.184 of females are higher than the male students Mean = 29.57 and SD = 7.097.

Table-3   Difference between males and females on subscale Involvement through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	29.24	6.381	
				3.289
Female	360	30.73	5.797	

df = 718; p < .01

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Table-3 explains that there is statistically significant difference between males and females regarding Involvement in the classroom. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.289 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had different level of involvement in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference about involvement of males and females" is not supported. It is further concluded by the analysis that the mean scores show that the female students Mean = 30.73; SD = 5.797 get more involved in their classroom activities with one another than the male students with Mean= 29.24 and SD = 6.381.

Table-4   Difference between males and females on subscale Investigation through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	28.47	6.480	4.187
Female	360	30.39	5.821	

df = 718; p < .001

Table-4 illustrates that there is statistically significant difference between males and females about Investigation. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 4.187 at .001 level is greater than the tabulated value= 3.291 at .001 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had different level of investigation in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference about investigation of males and females" is not supported. The analysis further states that the female students with Mean= 30.39 have higher investigation level than the male students with Mean= 28.47.

Table -5   Difference between males and females on subscale Task-Orientation through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	29.05	7.976	

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				3.330
Female	360	30.91	7.012	

df = 718; p < .01

Referring to table-5 it is proved that there is statistically significant difference between males and females in respect of Task Orientation. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.330 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had high difference level of task orientation in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference in respect of task orientation of males and females" is not supported. The analysis further states that the female students with Mean= 30.91 have higher task orientation level in their classroom than the male students with Mean= 29.05.

Table-6   Difference between males and females on subscale Cooperation through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t-value**
Male	360	29.13	6.329	
				4.350
Female	360	31.08	5.627	

df = 718; p < .001

Referring to table-6 it is proved that there is statistically significant difference between males and females in respect of Cooperation. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 4.350 at .001 level is greater than the tabulated value= 3.291 at .001 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had significant different level in respect of cooperation in their classroom.
Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference in respect of cooperation of males and females" is not supported. The analysis further concludes that the female students Mean= 31.08 have higher level of cooperation in their classroom than the male students Mean= 29.13.

Table-7   Difference between males and females on subscale Equity through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t-value**

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Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	30.71	5.590	
				1.00
Female	360	30.28	5.959	

df = 718; p > .05

Table-7 shows that there is statistically no significant difference between males and females in respect of equity in the classroom. The no significant difference was observed through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 1.00 at .05 level is smaller than the tabulated value= 1.960 at .05 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had equal level of equity in their classroom.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference regarding equity of males and females" is supported. It is further concluded by this analysis that the male students with Mean= 30.71 have slightly high equity among themselves in their classroom than the female students Mean= 30.28.

Table-8   Difference between males and females on total Learning Environment scale through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	206.11	41.236	
				3.383
Female	360	216.00	37.090	

df = 718; p <.01

Table-8 explains that there is statistically significant difference between males and females in respect of Learning Environment (WIHIC) scale. The significant difference was observed through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.383 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had significant difference regarding 'What is happening in this classroom' scale. Hence, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students regarding WIHIC" is not supported. The analysis further indicates that female students with Mean= 216.00 have higher scores on WIHIC than the males with Mean= 206.11.

Analysis of Attitude Scale gender-wise

Table-9   Difference between males and females on overall attitude towards the learning of English scale through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

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Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	85.48	21.798	
				3.325
Female	360	90.76	20.826	

df = 718; p < .01

Table-9 illustrates that there is statistically significant difference between males and females about their attitude towards the learning of English. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.325 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that males and females had significance difference in respect of attitude towards the learning of English.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference about attitude of the male and female students towards the learning of English" is not supported. The data further indicates that the female students mean= 90.76 show higher score on attitude than the male students mean= 85.48.

Table-10   Difference between males and females on subscale Adoption of English language attitude of attitude scale through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	42.11	10.925	
				3.404
Female	360	44.78	10.124	

df = 718; p < .01

Table-10 explains that there is statistically significant difference between male students and female students in respect of 'Adoption of English language attitude. The significant difference was proved through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 3.404 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that male students and female students had significant difference regarding 'Adoption of English language attitude'.

Hence, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students regarding adoption of English language attitude" is not supported. The analysis further indicates that female students mean= 44.78 are positive in adopting English language learning attitude than the male students mean= 42.11.

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| Table-11 | Difference between males and females on subscale Enjoyment of English lessons of attitude scale through Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test |

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	360	43.36	11.818	
				2.988
Female	360	45.97	11.632	

df = 718; p < .01

Table-11 reveals that there is statistically significant difference between male students and female students about Enjoyment of English lessons. The significant difference was found through the calculation of t-test which indicated that the calculated value of t= 2.988 at .01 level is greater than the tabulated value= 2.576 at .01 level that led to the conclusion that male students and female students had significance difference in respect of enjoyment of English lessons.

Therefore, the null hypothesis that "there is no statistically significant difference about enjoyment of the English on the part of male and female students" is not supported. The data further indicates that the female students mean= 45.97 reflect more enjoyment of English lessons than the male students mean= 43.36.

Table-23   **Pearson Correlation for relationship between Learning Environment dimensions and Attitude towards English**

Learning Environment scale	Attitude Towards English Overall	Adoption of English language attitude	Enjoyment of English Lessons
	r	r	r
WIHIC	.939***	.897***	.903***
Student Cohesiveness	.870***	.834***	.833***
Teacher Support	.848***	.812***	.821***
Involvement	.864***	.815***	.838***
Investigation	.899***	.861***	.862***
Task Orientation	.777***	.745***	.744***
Cooperation	.888***	.850***	.852***
Equity	.724***	.686***	.701***

***p<.001 level (2-tailed)

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Table-23 shows that scores of Learning Environment scale and that of Attitude scale correlated significantly. There is found high positive correlation between the whole Learning Environment scale with Attitude scale, $r = .939$ at .001 level.

The Learning Environment scale is also positively correlated with subscales of Attitude scale, that is, Adoption of English language attitude ($r = .897$ at .001); Enjoyment of English lessons ($r = .903$ at .001).

This suggests that classroom learning environment exerts high influence in fostering positive attitude in a foreign language classroom. Positive correlation shows their level of enjoyment and Adoption of language attitude in the foreign language classroom. Further is that, each subscale of Learning Environment is positively correlated with the subscales of Attitude scale. The positive correlation is significant at .001 that further supports that the dimensions of classroom learning environment are significant in developing negative or positive attitude towards the learning of a foreign language.

The subscale Student Cohesiveness of Learning Environment reveals that their cohesiveness brings about positive attitude towards English as the data shows about Student Cohesiveness, $r = .870$ at .001 with the overall Attitude scale; with subscale Adoption of language attitude, $r = .834$ at .001; with Enjoyment of English lessons, $r = .833$ at .001 which clearly reveals that in a classroom where students know each other closely and get friendly support, they might have positive attitude towards the learning of English.

Similarly, Teacher Support subscale reveals positive correlation with Adoption of language attitude, $r = .812$; with Enjoyment of English lessons, $r = .821$ and both are significant at .001.

This suggests that with the interest of the teacher in classroom activities, there occurs positive attitude towards language learning. Then Task Orientation and Equity subscales show positive correlation; Task Orientation $r = .777$ with total Attitude scale; $r = .745$ with Adoption of language attitude and $r = .744$ with Enjoyment of English lessons, significant at .001 and likewise, Investigation $r = .861$ with Adoption of language attitude and $r = .862$ with Enjoyment of English class; the subscale Cooperation $r = .850$ with Adoption of language attitude and $r = .852$ with Enjoyment of English lessons. This positive correlation reveals that the students would have positive attitude when the classroom learning environment positively supports the students.

Conclusions and Discussion

The study explored the gender differences and degree of relationship on two variables. Following conclusions and discussion were made on the basis of analysis and results:

Female students are closer to each other and receive more support from one another than the male students. Females have more cohesiveness in their classroom than the male students. Female students get more teacher support in their classroom than the male students. Females mean score is 31.35 is higher than males mean score 29.57. The t-test value 3.594 indicates

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significant difference. Girls are more involved in classroom activities than the male students. Mean score of girls 30.73 is higher than mean score of boys 29.24. t-test value shows significance difference.

Girls have higher level of investigation than boys. The mean score of girls 30.39 is higher than boys 28.47. On Task Orientation, girls know more about their work and what they have to do than boys. t-test value shows significance difference and mean score of girls 30.91 is higher than boys mean score 29.05.Girls are more cooperative in their class activities than the boys. Mean score of girls is 31.08 that is higher than boys 29.13. t-test values shows significant difference between the two. Significant difference was not found between girls and boys on Equity dimension of learning environment. Both girls and boys receive equal level of equity in their class. The mean score of girls is 30.28 and of boys 30.71.

Girls are more positive in adopting language leaning attitudes. On adoption of English language learning attitudes, girls mean score 44.78 is higher than boys mean score 42.11. Boys are slower in adopting English language learning attitudes. t-test value shows significant difference at .01 level.

Dimensions of learning environment scale indicated positive correlation with attitude dimensions towards foreign language learning. Significant positive correlation was found for Student Cohesiveness, Teacher Support, Involvement, Investigation, Task Orientation, Cooperation and Equity of learning environment scale with Adoption of English language learning attitude, Enjoyment of English lessons of Attitude scale. Favorable psychosocial classroom environment fosters positive attitude towards foreign language learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the light of findings and conclusion of the study:

1. Efforts might be made to create pleasant and favorable classroom learning environment for better teaching learning process that may focus on student cohesiveness, teacher support, cooperation and equity in the classroom.
2. Adoption of English language learning attitude and enjoyment of English lessons may increase with the development of student cohesiveness, teacher support, cooperation and equity in the classroom.
3. Favorable interpersonal interaction between teacher and the students, and students to students may be promoted through light discussion in the classroom and easy assignments for students for pleasant learning environment.
4. Students' enjoyment in English lessons might be increased by making lessons easier and interesting.
5. English language teachers might be trained to motivate students to develop positive attitude towards English language learning by familiarizing the students with English movies, programs and removing their fear of English through short sentences of daily routine life.

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